

Message Text

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16

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DEPT PASS NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION OFFICE OF POLAR PROGRAMS

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SUBJ: LEASE R/V ELTANIN

1. DISCUSSIONS WITH ARGENTINE ANTARCTIC INSTITUTE, ARGENTINE NAVAL HYDROGRAPHIC SERVICE, AND NAVY POLICY OFFICE, INDICATE THAT COOPERATIVE ARRANGEMENT FOR OPERATION OF R/V ELTANIN STILL UNDER CONSIDERATION AT HIGHEST LEVEL IN ARGENTINE NAVY. PRINCIPAL PROBLEM CONTINUES TO BE UNWILLINGNESS OF ARGENTINE ANTARCTIC INSTITUTE TO MAKE PREVIOUSLY PROMISED \$200,000 ANNUAL PAYMENT TOWARD COST OF SHIPS OPERATION, ALTHOUGH OTHER "POLITICAL" FACTORS WILL UNDOUBTEDLY ALSO BE CONSIDERED. BRIG RUIZ EXPLAINED TO SCICOUNS AND REPLACEMENT THAT WHILE USE OF ELTANIN CONTINUES TO BE OF GREAT INTEREST TO INSTITUTE, \$200,000 CONTRIBUTION TO COST OF SHIPS OPERATION, COUPLED WITH EXPENDITURE OF SIMILAR SUM, ALREADY PROGRAMMED, ON PERSONNEL AND EQUIPMENT FOR INSTITUTES OCEANOGRAPHY PROGRAM, WOULD INVOLVE ALLOCATION OF NEARLY 40 PERCENT OF INSTITUTES TOTAL BUDGET TO ELTANIN PROGRAM, WHICH HE CONSIDERS ENTIRELY UNACCEPTABLE. NAVAL HYDROGRAPHIC SERVICE ALSO CONTINUES TO FAVOR ELTANIN ARRANGEMENT, AND HAS SO INFORMED ARGENTINE NAVAL STAFF, BUT STRESSES THAT POLITICAL AND FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS ARE BEYOND ITS COMPETENCE.

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2. RUIZ INDICATED WILLINGNESS OF INSTITUTE TO TRANSFER FUNDS WHICH IT NOW EXPENDS FOR FUEL FOR OPERATION OF ARGENTINE RESEARCH VESSEL GOLLENA, WHICH HE ESTIMATED AT \$60,000 PER YEAR, TO OPERATION OF ELTANIN, IF AND WHEN IT READY TO OPERATE IN REPLACEMENT OF GOLLENA. IN THIS REGARD, RUIZ IS CONVINCED THAT IN VIEW OF DELAYS TO DATE, THERE IS NO CHANCE FOR ELTANIN TO OPERATE DURING FORTHCOMING ANTARCTIC SEASON.

3. ARGENTINE NAVY INFORMED SCICOUNS THAT TWO MINOR PROBLEMS WITH WITH FINAL DRAFT OF AGREEMENT HAVE EMERGED, AND WERE PASSED TO ARGENTINE NAVAL ATTACHE IN WASHINGTON ABOUT TWO WEEKS AGO FOR DISCUSSION WITH NSF. PROBLEMS RELATE TO SAFETY OF TECHNICAL CREW, AND RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CAPTAIN AND US SCIENTIFIC LEADER. RESOLUTION OF THESEALLEGEDLY MINOR POINTS WOULD PERMIT ARGENTINE NAVY AGREEMENT WITH DRAFT, WITHOUT OF COURSE, IMPLYING THAT QUESTION OF PRINCIPAL HAS YET BEEN RESOLVED.EMBASSY SUGGESTS NSF CONTACT ARGENTINE NAVAL ATTACHE TO REVIEW THOSE POINTS, IF HE HAS NOT ALREADY TAKEN INITIATIVE.

4. SCICOUNS STRESSED IMPORTANCE OF EARLY DECISION ON ELTANIN IN VIEW OF CONTINUING STAND BY COSTS AND ADVANTAGES TO BOTH PARTIES OF RETURNING SHIP TO USEFUL WORK AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. EMBASSY BELIEVES ODDS FOR FAVORABLE ARGENTINE DECISION ARE NOW NO BETTER THAN 50-50, BUT BELIEVES AUTHORITIES AT LEAST WELL AWARE OF NEED FOR DECISIONPROMPTLY AFTER ARGENTINE ELECTIONS OF SEPT 23.

5. DECISION TO ACCEPT ELTANIN IS NOW IN HANDS OF CINC ADM ALVAREZ. INFORMATION AVAILABLE TO NAVAL ATTACHE INDICATES POSITIVE RECOMMENDATION FROM BOTH ARGENTINE ANTARCTIC INSTITUTE AND BY NAVAL STAFF. PRIVATE DISCUSSIONS WITH CAPT MARIENHOFF DISCLOSED THAT DELAY IN ARGENTINE NAVY DECISION IS DUE TO POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS BETWEEN PRESENT GOVERNMENT AND ARGENTINE NAVY. PRESENT GOVERNMENTIS AT A PRACTICAL STANDSTILL AWAITING RESULTS OF ELECTIONS ON SEPT 23. RECOMMEND DECISION TO ACCEPT OR REJECT ELTANIN BE WITHHELD UNTIL REASONABLE PERIOD FOLLOWING ARGENTINE ELECTIONS. FYI, CAPT MACKINLEY EXPECTED TO RETURN TO ANTARCTIC INSTITUTE AS DIRECTOR IN OCTOBER. WHILE EMBASSY DOUBTS HE CAN REVERSE CURRENT NEGATIVE DECISION ON FUNDING, HE SHOULD BE ABLE TO PUSH MATTER MORE EFFECTIVELY IN ARGENTINE NAVY.

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